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## MATTHEW ARNOLD.

IF a reason must be given for a study of Matthew Arnold's works at this time, one might say, perhaps first of all, that the "Letters" have not only thrown new light upon Arnold's personality, but have made clearer than ever before the task he had set himself, and especially the spirit in which he gave himself to that task. Arnold knew himself better, of course, than anybody else knew him, and in his familiar letters, especially those to his mother and sisters—letters meant only for the family circle, and free from a shadow of suspicion that a wider audience was ever in mind—we have his own estimate of the worth of his work, and his own statement of the hindrances that hampered his literary effort.

In this paper the object has been, so far as possible, to let Arnold, by means of his "Letters," state his own case, and the same purpose has determined the extensive quotations made from his works. Those who would get the most out of the "Letters" must consider them in the light of a self-revelation, not as a collection from which Arnold's opinions of other men and other men's works may be learned. In bulk Arnold's twenty-one volumes constitute a sufficiently large output; and in prose, at least, we all feel, perhaps, that he found adequate expression of himself. He was a great literary critic, doubtless the greatest and safest that the English-speaking race has yet produced, and though hindered much by his outward circumstances, he yet found opportunity to deliver his message. If things had been different, we should doubtless have had more of those incomparable introductions to the poets; and we shall always regret that he did not leave the evidently intended further essay on Shelley. Still we have his "secret" and his "method" of literary criticism in the collected edition of his critical works prepared with his own hand. He was greatly hindered, it is true, by the fact that he had to give his main effort during

his whole life to the exacting duties of a school inspectorship, in order to win bread for his family. "Qualified by nature and training for the highest honors and successes which the world can give, he spent his life in a long round of unremunerative drudgery, working even beyond the limits of his strength for those whom he loved, and never, by word or sign, betraying even a consciousness of that dull indifference to his gifts and services which stirred the fruitless indignation of his friends."<sup>1</sup>

He rose superior to these hindrances, I think, in the matter of the prose expression of himself; but it was his poetic faculty that suffered, and it is there that the world has cause chiefly to regret that he was so hampered. He himself told F. W. H. Myers that "his official work, though it did not check his prose writing, checked his poetry." If any one, considering what his great contemporaries, Tennyson and Browning, achieved, be inclined to criticise Arnold, let him blame if he can after reading the following: "Indeed, if the opinion of the general public about my poems were the same as that of the leading literary men, I should make more money by them than I do. But, more than this, I should gain the stimulus necessary to enable me to produce my best—all that I have in me, whatever that may be—to produce which is no light matter with an existence so hampered as mine is. People do not understand what a temptation there is, if you cannot bear anything not *very good*, to transfer your operations to a region where form is everything. Perfection of a certain kind may there be attained, or at least approached, without knocking yourself to pieces, but to attain or approach perfection in the region of thought and feeling, and to unite this with perfection of form, demands not merely an effort and a labor, but an actual tearing of one's self to pieces, which one does not readily consent to (although one is sometimes forced to it), unless one can devote one's whole life to poetry. Wordsworth could give his whole life to it; Shelley and Byron both could, and were besides driven by their demon to do it. Tennyson, a far in-

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to "Letters," by G. W. E. Russell.

ferior natural power to either of the three, can; but of the moderns Goethe is the only one, I believe, of those who had an *existence assujettie* who has thrown himself with a great result into poetry. And even he felt what I say, for he could no doubt have done more *poetically* had he been freer; but it is not so light a matter, when you have other grave claims on your powers, to submit voluntarily to the exhaustion of the best poetical production in a time like this. Goethe speaks somewhere of the endless matters on which he had employed himself, and says that with the labor he had given to them he might have produced half a dozen more good tragedies; 'but to produce these,' he says, 'I must have been *sehr zerrissen*.' It is only in the best poetical epochs (such as the Elizabethan) that you can descend into yourself and produce the best of your thought and feeling naturally and without an overwhelming, and in some degree morbid, effort; for then all the people around you are more or less doing the same thing. It is natural, it is the bent of the time, to do it; its being the bent of the time, indeed, is what makes the time a *poetical* one."<sup>1</sup>

I have quoted this passage at length, because it is the most important reference in the "Letters" to the hindrances which clogged Arnold's poetic effort, and because it is an admirable general statement, to be supported by the passages which follow here. "I am now at the work," he writes at forty-one, "I dislike most in the world: looking over and marking examination papers. I was stopped last week by my eyes, and the last year or two these sixty papers a day of close handwriting to read have, I am sorry to say, much tried my eyes for the time. They soon recover, however, and no reading ever seems to hurt them. At present I can do nothing after my papers are done but write the indispensable letters for that day's post."<sup>2</sup> The next year he writes to Lady de Rothschild as follows: "I must go back to my charming occupation of hearing students give lessons. Here is my programme for this afternoon: Avalanches—The Steam Engine—The Thames—India Rubber—Bricks

<sup>1</sup>"Letters," I., 72 f. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 207.

—The Battle of Poitiers—Subtraction—The Reindeer—The Gunpowder Plot—The Jordan. Alluring, is it not? Twenty minutes each, and the days of one's life are only threescore years and ten."<sup>1</sup>

Three months later he writes: "I am being driven furious by seven hundred closely written grammar papers which I have to look over, and an obstinate cold in the head at the same time."<sup>2</sup> Again, to Lady de Rothschild, still two years later: "I have," he says, "in the next two months, besides my usual school work, to look over thirty sacred poems, the same number of Newdigates (the Oxford prize poem), ten Latin poems, and several English essays; to give a lecture on Celtic poetry, of which, as the *Saturday Review* truly says, I know nothing; to write a Latin speech, and to report on the secondary instruction of the continent of Europe."<sup>3</sup>

The everlasting grind of examination papers becomes exceedingly pathetic on one occasion. He writes thus to his sister, Mrs. Forster, January 4, 1868: "Poor little Basil [his infant son] died this afternoon, a few minutes before one o'clock. I sat up with him till four this morning, looking over my papers, that Flu and Mrs. Tuffin might get some sleep, and at the end of every second paper I went to him, stroked his poor twitching hand and kissed his soft warm cheek; and though he never slept, he seemed easy, and hardly moaned at all. This morning about six, after I had gone to bed, he became more restless; about eleven he had another convulsion; from that time he sank."<sup>4</sup>

On his birthday, that same year (December 24, 1868), Arnold writes to his mother: "Tell Edward I divide my papers (second-year grammar) through every day, taking in Christmas day, Saturdays, and Sundays. In this way I bring them down to twenty-five a day, which I can do without the strain on my head and eyes which forty a day, or—as I used often to make it in old times by delaying at first—eighty or ninety a day, would be. I am up at six, and work at

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," I., 281. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 285. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 381. <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 443.

at the preface to my 'Culture and Anarchy' essays; work again at this, and read, between breakfast and luncheon. Play racquets and walk between luncheon and four; from four to seven look over my twenty-five papers, and then after dinner write my letters and read a little."<sup>1</sup>

Passages of similar tenor might be multiplied almost indefinitely from the "Letters;" but these will suffice, perhaps, to indicate not only how he was hampered in his literary effort, but also how conscientious he was in the performance of his drudgery tasks, how industrious in reading as well as in writing.

In such a paper, it is necessary to ignore almost entirely a large part of Arnold's work, and to restrict attention to what is of universal and permanent value. As to what is of permanent value, doubtless everybody will agree. If Arnold lives, it will be as a critic of literature and as a poet. His school reports were, and are, exceedingly valuable; but such things are not literature, even when written by an Arnold. As the world rolls on and times change, old questions lose interest, and new problems present themselves in religion, in social life, in politics; the treatment of such questions, except in their permanent aspects, cannot be literature, and, in the long run, only literature survives, except for the specialist. This remark does not apply, however, to "Culture and Anarchy;" at least so much of it as treats of the distinction between "Hebraism" and "Hellenism." Arnold himself rightly felt that the distinction thus drawn was of more than transient value. "The chapters on 'Hellenism' and 'Hebraism,'" he wrote to his mother, "are, in the main, I am convinced, so true that they will form a kind of center for English thought and speculation on the matters treated in them." One is tempted to make an exception again in favor of "Literature and Dogma," if only for the great aphorism, "Conduct is three-fourths of life," so beautifully illustrated there. But that aphorism is everywhere in Arnold's works, and, better still, is on its winged way among men.

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<sup>1</sup> "Letters," I., 467.

## THE CRITIC.

An enthusiastic student of English literature remarked to me once that Matthew Arnold will live by his poetry; that the ideas and ideals for which he stood in his criticism will pass into the general atmosphere of culture, and it will be forgotten by most that we owe them to Arnold. The remark was made with the highest appreciation of Arnold's influence as a critic, and my friend did not know, I am sure, that he was almost quoting Frederic Harrison. "We can have little doubt now," says Harrison, "when so much of Arnold's prose work in criticism has been accepted as standard opinion, and so much of his prose work in controversy has lost its savor, that it is his poetry which will be longest remembered, and there his finest vein was reached."<sup>1</sup> Many were doubtless long before agreed with Andrew Lang in the general proposition that his poems were "by far his most important and most permanent contribution to literature." To have one's ideas become a part of the *literary* atmosphere is to have accomplished a great work, even if one's self be forgotten; and Arnold himself would, I am sure, have been satisfied to believe that this would be the fate of his criticism. Writing to one of his sisters about his article on "The Burials Bill," he said: "It is a seed sown in the thoughts of the young and fair-minded, the effect of which will be gradual but persistent. In all I write this is the sort of effect I aim at."<sup>2</sup> And to his mother he wrote: "To be less and less *personal* in one's desires and working is the great matter, and this, too, I feel, I am glad to say, more deeply than I did."<sup>3</sup> Again to the same: "One can only get one's self really accepted by men by making one's self forgotten in the people and doctrines one recommends."

Men may cease to read the essays on Wordsworth, Milton, Keats, and Byron; but we shall read these and other great poets more, and appreciate them better because of Arnold's essays. For one of these, Wordsworth, Arnold, more than

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<sup>1</sup> "Nineteenth Century," March, 1896. <sup>2</sup> "Letters," II., 155. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I., 400.

any other person, vindicated his rightful position in English letters, and with that little volume of superb selections made it easy for the elect to come under Wordsworth's spell. And for Keats, who does not feel that Arnold has said the supreme word? Shelley had written of Keats:

Till the Future dares  
Forget the past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity.

Tennyson had said, "Keats, with his high spiritual vision, would have been, if he had lived, the greatest of us all;" but Arnold wrote, "He is with Shakspeare!" When a critic like Arnold says that, he compels us to read Keats; and when we read Keats, if we have any poetry in our souls, we are Keats's forever.

I say the thoughts of the essays may pass into the general literary atmosphere, and it may become no longer necessary to read them, but I cannot imagine this of the essay on "The Study of Poetry." I can hardly imagine even the cultivated public not needing to read and reread this masterly, simple treatise. It ought to be read by young people once a year. Frederic Harrison says of it: "Arnold's piece on 'The Study of Poetry,' written as an introduction to the collected 'English Poets,' should be preserved in our literature as the norma, or canon, of right opinion about poetry, as we preserve the standard coins in the Pyx, or the standard yard measure in the old Jewel-house at Westminster."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* In a footnote Harrison adds: "This does not include *obiter dicta* in his familiar letters. A great critic, like the pope, is infallible only when he is speaking *ex cathedra*, on matters of faith." One thinks at once of Tennyson, to whom Arnold never was quite just in the "Letters"—*e. g.*, I., 278: "I do not think Tennyson a great and powerful spirit in any line." (Compare also I., 72, 147, 280.) Such *obiter dicta* must be offset by Arnold's remark to Hallam Tennyson: "Your father has been our most popular poet for forty years, and, on the whole, he has deserved it." One is even more startled, perhaps, at this epistolary verdict on Thackeray: "He is not, to my thinking, a great writer." ("Letters," I., 247.) These judgments would certainly have been modified if given *ex cathedra*; and when one remembers the concluding paragraph of the essay on "Joubert," one cannot but hope that Arnold would have qualified this remark concerning the great Whig historian: "Macaulay is to me uninteresting, mainly, I think, from a dash of intellectual vulgarity which I find in all his performance." ("Letters," II., 155.)



"Every critic," says Arnold, in the essay on "The Function of Criticism," "should try and possess one great literature at least besides his own, and the more unlike his own, the better." That was the minimum requirement. Very similar is his answer to the objection to studying other languages on the ground that we have enough to do to know our own: "It is true, as Goethe said, that no man who knows only his own language knows even that." Of Scherer Arnold said: "He knows thoroughly the language and literature of England, Italy, Germany, as well as France." His own outfit was perhaps even more complete. He possessed, as the basis of his culture, an extraordinarily thorough knowledge and an exquisite appreciation of Greek literature, especially Greek poetry, knowing as few men have done Homer, Sophocles, Æschylus, and Pindar, besides Plato, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. In Latin he was well versed, and familiar especially with Lucretius and Virgil. In Hebrew he had some knowledge of the original, and was steeped in the literature of the Old and New Testaments, including the Septuagint, the Vulgate (for which as literature he had the profoundest sympathy and admiration), and the best literature of mediæval Christianity. Of modern literatures he knew best, of course, the French. Indeed, it might be said, with a large measure of truth, that he learned his art of criticism from the French. Next to French he knew best the German literature, and was familiar with the results of German scholarship, at least in Biblical lines. With Italian there are indications that he was at least fairly well acquainted, and he knew Dante well. In English literature he was, of course, widely and deeply read—more so in the older literature than the contemporary—and in all the greatest poetry a master without a rival.

With Arnold "culture is reading." From his writings we may learn his "doctrine," and from his "Letters" we may gather his "method" as to reading. "Desultory reading," he writes to one of his sisters,<sup>1</sup> "is a mere anodyne;

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<sup>1</sup> "Letters," II., 127.

regular reading, well chosen, is restoring and edifying." "My great desire in education," he says in one of his letters,<sup>1</sup> "is to get a few good books universally taught and read. Twenty, I think, is about all I would have in the direct teaching of the young, and to be learned as text-books. Young people may read for themselves collaterally as much as they like." Again, in his sixtieth year, he writes:<sup>2</sup> "The importance of reading—not slight stuff to get through the time, but the best that has been written—forces itself upon me more and more every year I live; it is living in good company, the best company, and people are generally quite keen enough, or too keen, about doing that; yet they will not do it in the simplest and most innocent manner by reading. However, if I live to be eighty, I shall probably be the only person left in England who reads anything but newspapers and scientific publications." He advises his sister, Mrs. Forster,<sup>3</sup> "to read something of Burke's every year," because Burke "treats politics with his thought and imagination;" because he is "our greatest English prose writer."

Arnold's own "method," or practice, in reading is easy to discover. Of Gray he said: "He lived with the great poets; he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them." And Arnold himself lived constantly, from youth to age, with the great Greeks. In the second sonnet, in reply to the question, "Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind?" he says that he is occupied with Homer, "clearest-souled of men;" with Epictetus, "whose friendship I not long since won;" and especially with Sophocles,

Who saw life steadily and saw it whole.

In 1849 he writes: "I have within this year gone through all Homer's works and all those ascribed to him." And he is reading, at the same time, biographies of Byron, Scott, Napoleon, Goethe, Burns. The next year he is reading "Goethe's letters, Bacon, Pindar, Sophocles, Milton, Thomas à Kempis and 'Ecclesiasticus.'" In 1857 he writes:

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 164. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 227. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 249.

“What I learn in studying Sophocles for my present purpose is, or seems to me, wonderful.” In 1860 he is “reading a great deal in the ‘Iliad’ again.” In 1861 he gives his three lectures on “Translating Homer,” saying at the outset that “for one or two years the works of Homer were seldom out of his hands.” In his fortieth year we find him at night, after inspecting schools, reading “about a hundred lines of the ‘Odyssey’ to keep himself from putrefaction;” and in his sixty-third year he uses the “Odyssey” to take the taste of Daudet’s “Sapho” out of his mouth. The very last reference in the “Letters” to Greek literature represents him as “reading five pages of Greek anthology every day.”

As to other literature besides the classical, the “Letters” confirm the impression that he kept in his general reading largely to the great authors. His first youthful enthusiasm in French was George Sand, “the greatest spirit in our European world from the time that Goethe departed.”<sup>1</sup> Later his favorite French authors were Sainte-Beuve, Voltaire, Joubert, Senancour, Maurice de Guérin, Renan, Scherer. His friend and master in criticism was Sainte-Beuve, “the first critic of our time.” The circle of French writers at Paris, to which Sainte-Beuve and Scherer belonged, he thought “perhaps the most truly cultivated in the world.” The three Germans whom he knew best were doubtless Lessing, Heine, and Goethe. The last was to him “the greatest poet of modern times, the greatest critic of all times.” Goethe and Wordsworth, he says in a letter, “are the two moderns I most care for.” Heine was “the most important successor and continuator of Goethe in Goethe’s most important line of activity”—namely as “a soldier in the war of liberation of humanity;” and so he was “in the European poetry of that quarter of a century which follows the death of Goethe incomparably the most important figure.”

In English prose, Arnold’s favorite authors seem to have been Burke, Newman, and possibly Emerson. For New-

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<sup>1</sup>“Letters,” II., 152.

man's great qualities he had the profoundest admiration, as of "a man who alone in Oxford of his generation, alone of many generations, conveyed to us in his genius that same charm, that same ineffable sentiment, which this exquisite place itself conveys." Of English poets it were but necessary to name all the greatest; with all these Arnold "lived." But it would be safe, I think, to say that the works and authors which he loved most, studied longest, and absorbed most completely were the Bible, Homer, Sophocles, Goethe, Wordsworth, and Sainte-Beuve.

Arnold's "doctrine of studies" is contained, he himself said,<sup>1</sup> in his lecture on "Literature and Science." His "doctrine of criticism" is found perhaps most succinctly stated in his essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," which serves as a general introduction to his two volumes of "Essays in Criticism." His "doctrine of style" is best given in the essay on "The Influence of Academies."

The business of the critical power is, he says in the essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," "in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is." True criticism "tends to make the best ideas prevail." "Its business is simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known to create a current of new and fresh ideas." "Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature."

Criticism's best spiritual work is "to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him toward perfection by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things." Why has it so little accomplished this in England? Because it has not kept in the purely intellectual sphere, has been so practical, polemical, controversial. "Without a disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest cul-

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 253.

ture are out of the question." The duty of criticism is "to be perpetually dissatisfied" with everything which falls short of "a high and perfect ideal." Criticism "must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims." "Let us betake ourselves more," says Arnold, "to the serener life of the mind and spirit."

The critic is to help us enlarge and complete ourselves by bringing in the elements in which we are deficient, not as Carlyle, by "preaching earnestness to a nation which has plenty of it by nature."<sup>1</sup> The English-speaking race is distinguished by energy and honesty, and has a sense for conduct; the French by a sense for social life and manners; the Germans by a sense for knowledge; the Greeks had a sense for beauty, for social life and manners, for knowledge, but not, in the highest degree, for conduct. By studying the points wherein we are weak and the elements wherein other peoples are strong, and bringing in those qualities in which we are not strong, we shall complete and develop ourselves.

The great business of the critic is the spread of culture. What Arnold meant by culture may be understood, perhaps, from the following extracts from "Sweetness and Light:" Culture is "a desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are." "Culture is a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature." "It is in endless additions to itself, in the endless expansion of its powers, in endless growth in wisdom and beauty, that the spirit of the human race finds its ideal." Culture is "the study and pursuit of perfection." Culture "places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality." "Culture seeks to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere." Culture's aim is "to make reason and the will of God prevail."

"Culture is reading," said Arnold; and he "looked to

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 222.

literature for gradually opening and softening men's minds." He looked to literature even to interpret the Bible afresh, and to put religion on a sounder basis. He considered Lord Salisbury a dangerous man, "chiefly from his want of any true sense and experience of literature and its beneficent function. Religion he knows and physical science he knows, but the immense work between the two, which is for literature to accomplish, he knows nothing of."<sup>1</sup>

The critic's chief function, then, is to be a guide to the best literature. He is to cultivate in himself, and stimulate in others, a conscience in letters, to induce the attitude which Sainte-Beuve claims for France. "In France the first consideration for us is not whether we are amused and pleased by a work of art or mind, nor is it whether we are touched by it. What we seek above all to learn is whether *we are right* in being amused with it, and in applauding it, and in being moved by it." To be such a guide as Arnold demands, the critic must be, as Sainte-Beuve was, "a man of extraordinary delicacy of tact and judgment in literature;" and "perfect, so far as a poor mortal critic can be perfect, in knowledge of his subject, in judgment, in tact and tone." He must be, further, "a man of genius, with the *étincelle* and the instinctive good sense and moderation which make a guide really attaching and useful."<sup>2</sup>

The course of literary criticism "is determined for it by the idea which is the law of its being; the idea of a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that has been known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." And since much of the best that has been known and thought in the world must necessarily be foreign, "the English critic of literature must dwell much on foreign thought, and with particular heed on any part of it, which, while significant and fruitful in itself, is for any reason specially likely to escape him." For "the criticism which alone can help us for the future . . . is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 41. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 173.

joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have, for their proper outfit, a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another." "I hate," he says in a letter,<sup>1</sup> "all overpreponderance of single elements, and all my efforts are directed to enlarge and complete us by bringing in as much as possible of Greek, Latin, Celtic authors." Every one, therefore, with any turn for literature will do well steadily to widen his culture, severely to check in himself the provincial spirit; and to keep in mind "that all mere glorification by ourselves of ourselves or our literature . . . is both vulgar and, besides being vulgar, retarding." "Instead of always fixing our thoughts upon the points in which our literature and our intellectual life generally are strong, we should from time to time fix them upon those in which they are weak, and so learn to perceive what we have to amend."

As to pronouncing judgment on literature, which is often regarded as the critic's one business, Arnold, in stating what he conceives to be the true principle, impliedly, explains his own method: "The judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it—but insensibly, and in the second place, not in the first, as a sort of companion and clue, not as an abstract lawgiver—that the critic will generally do most good to readers."

Following his own principle—"to learn and propagate the best that has been known and thought in the world"—Arnold concerned himself little with the mass of current English literature; partly because so little of it came under that definition, more because the personal bias was so liable to influence the critic's judgment of contemporary authors. But to those who must deal with current English literature he suggested to try it, so far as they could, by the standard of the best that is known and thought in the world; and

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<sup>1</sup> "Letters," I, 287.

that, "to get anywhere near this standard, every critic should try and possess one great literature at least, besides his own, and the more unlike his own the better."

The great function of criticism is to prepare the way for creative epochs of literature. To have the sense of creative activity—"the great happiness and the great proof of being alive"—is not denied to criticism; "but then criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge." "Still, in full measure, the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation; in literature we must never forget that. It is no such common matter for a gifted nature to come into possession of a current of true and living ideas, and to produce amidst the inspiration of them, that we are likely to underrate it. The epochs of Æschylus and Shakspeare make us feel their preëminence. In an epoch like those is, no doubt, the true life of literature; there is the promised land, toward which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness; but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already perhaps the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity."

As compared with our own chief critic, Lowell, Arnold educates more, though he dazzles less. "Lowell's address at Birmingham," said Arnold in a letter,<sup>1</sup> "is full of good things, and the *Times* is loud in its praise. But here again I feel the want of body and current in the discourse as a whole, and am not satisfied with a host of shrewd and well-wrought and even brilliant sayings." That is not an unjust criticism. The great merit of both critics was to have led men to appreciate more fully, to love more profoundly, the great poets. But Arnold is more constructive, more educative, than Lowell. He can tell us simply, but at the same time almost unerringly, wherein and why a poet is great. He lays bare the secret of his power. Above all, he helps us to feel that the great poets are not only necessary but delightful reading. His doctrine on poetry, or any particular poet,

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 313.



seems often, on first reading, so simple as hardly to be a body of doctrine at all. But after reading his two volumes of "Essays in Criticism" you realize that the doctrine has been a leavening, an enriching influence, that he has educated you in good taste.

When a young man, after reading the "Count of Monte Christo," read the sixth book of the "Odyssey" and said, "I could have shouted for joy; I knew that was literature," I said to myself, "That is just the way Arnold works." Arnold's essays on "The Study of Poetry" and on Wordsworth made me a Wordsworthian. I had read Lowell's essay on Wordsworth years before, and had been scarcely more attracted to than repelled from Wordsworth, so much does Lowell lay stress on the dullness and prosiness of so large a part of Wordsworth's poetry. Arnold too "marks the *longueurs* of Wordsworth, his flatness, his mass of inferior work," as Frederic Harrison says. But he made a volume of superb selections of Wordsworth's masterpieces. His essay sent me to that volume, and that volume made me a Wordsworthian forever.

When Lady Airlie told Disraeli that she thought Arnold's aptness at coining and establishing current phrases was a disadvantage, since people got hold of the phrases and then thought that they knew all about his work, Disraeli replied: "Never mind; it is a great achievement." And it was. "This is a very rare power," says Frederic Harrison, "and one peculiarly rare amongst Englishmen. Carlyle had it, Disraeli had it; but how few others amongst our contemporaries! Arnold's current phrases still in circulation are more numerous than those of Disraeli, and are more simple and apt than Carlyle's. These *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* fly through the speech of cultivated men, pass current in the market place; they are generative, efficient, and issue into act. They may be right or wrong, but at any rate they do their work. They teach, they guide, possibly may mislead, but they are alive."

When Arnold speaks of Homer's poetry as "rapid, direct, simple, and noble;" of "the inspiring and intoxicating ef-

fect" of the power and style of Pindar; of Chaucer's "liquid diction, fluid movement;" of Spenser's "fluidity and sweet ease;" of "Shaksperian largeness and indulgence;" of Milton's "sure and flawless perfection of rhythm and diction;" of Gray as "the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but still a classic;" of Burns' "spring, bounding swiftness;" of Wordsworth's "high seriousness" and his "healing power;" of the "magic of style," the "fascinating felicity" of Keats; of Byron that "our soul had *felt* him like the thunder's roll;" of Shelley as "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain"—we feel all the truth and force of a fairly adequate definition. Only a great critic could so hit off things. Such criticism "illuminates and rejoices us."

What Philistine even is there who cannot count off a long roll of Arnold's apt designations and phrases? "Philistine," "Barbarian," "saving remnant," "young lions of the press," "urbanity," "balance," "high seriousness," "sweet reasonableness," "sweetness and light," "stream of tendency," "lucidity of soul," "liquid diction," "fluid movement," "the grand style," "magic of style," "note of provinciality," "note of distinction," "sense" for conduct, for knowledge, for beauty, for social life and manners. How many, too, of Arnold's definitions and aphoristic sayings lodge in the mind, and work like leaven to clarify and purify one's ideas! "The Eternal Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness;" "Israel's master feeling, the feeling for righteousness;" "religion is morality touched by emotion;" "conduct is three-fourths of life;" "poetry is a criticism of life;" "culture is reading;" "genius, the ruling divinity of poetry;" "intelligence, the ruling divinity of prose;" "politics, that 'wild and dreamlike trade' of insincerity;" "excellence is not common or abundant;" "the ideal, the saving ideal of a high and rare excellence;" "the discipline of respect for a high and flawless work;" "the severe discipline necessary for all real culture."

## THE POET.

“Goethe’s task was, the inevitable task for the modern poet henceforth is—as it was for the Greek poet in the days of Pericles—not to preach a sublime sermon on a given text, like Dante; not to exhibit all the kingdoms of human life, and the glory of them, like Shakspeare; but to interpret human life afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it.” So writes Arnold, in “Lectures on Celtic Literature,” and impliedly defines the task which he had set himself in his own poetry. “To interpret human life afresh, to supply a new spiritual basis to it,” was indeed Arnold’s chief effort in the majority of his prose works—“Literature and Dogma,” “God and the Bible,” “St. Paul and Protestantism,” “Culture and Anarchy”—as well as in his poetry. Indeed, Arnold’s chief concern in life was *religion*. In this he was his father’s son. Dean Stanley and Thomas Hughes seem, in active religious and social life, the natural outcome of Dr. Arnold’s vigorous liberalism in religion; perhaps as inevitable, though a remoter, outcome in letters were Matthew Arnold, Arthur Clough, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. Certainly Arnold always thought that he was doing his father’s work, and he always claimed that his critical studies touching the Bible were religious. “I never touch,” says he,<sup>1</sup> “on considerations about the state without feeling myself on his ground.” He was delighted when Dean Stanley told him that the ideas of the preface to “Culture and Anarchy” were exactly what his father would have approved. In a letter to his sister, Miss Arnold, he says: “It will more and more become evident how religious is the work I have done in “Literature and Dogma.” And he concludes the preface to “God and the Bible” with the claim that “a calmer and more gradual judgment” will recognize his work “to have been an attempt conservative, and an attempt religious.”

“Not to break with one’s connection with the past in one’s religion is one of the strongest instincts in human na-

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<sup>1</sup>“Letters,” I., 400.

ture," said Arnold with regard to Catholicism,<sup>1</sup> and his whole life was an effort not to break entirely with the past in religion. One finds, according to Arnold, one's truest expression in poetry, and here we may look for the deepest religious note in Arnold. What was the dominant note of his poetry? It was "the eternal note of sadness," "a brooding over man's destiny," the Weltschmerz,

A longing to inquire  
Into the mystery of this heart which beats  
So wild, so deep in us—to know  
Whence our lives come and where they go.<sup>2</sup>

His poetry was an attempt to express "the world's deep, inarticulate craving for spiritual peace." There was in Arnold a combination of the Greek strain and the Oriental. He would have the joy of the Greek; he has the resigned sadness of the Oriental. Deep down even in the Greek there is an undertone of melancholy, and this undertone was strong in Arnold. The source of his sadness was primarily the change from the simple religious views which characterized the home of his childhood, and the sense of "the century's eclipse of faith." His was the anguish of Stagirius,

When the soul, growing clearer,  
Sees God no nearer,  
When the soul, mounting higher,  
To God comes no nigher.

Perhaps "The Grande Chartreuse," best of all Arnold's poems, expresses the change that had taken place in him, the void left in his heart, the "nameless sadness" that resulted.

For rigorous teachers seized my youth,  
And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,  
Showed me the high white star of Truth,  
There bade me gaze and there aspire.

In the "Carthusian Monastery" he feels

As on some far northern strand,  
Thinking of his own gods, a Greek  
In pity and mournful awe might stand  
Before some fallen Runic stone—  
For both were faiths, and both are gone.

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 151.   <sup>2</sup>"The Buried Life."

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
 The other powerless to be born,  
 With nowhere yet to rest my head,  
 Like these on earth I wait forlorn.  
 Their faith, my tears, the world deride,  
 I come to shed them at their side.

This is the real cry of Arnold's heart, and it is a note we get only in his poems. And we cannot help wondering sometimes, Are the only alternatives the course of Huxley or the course of Newman? Are all other resting places temporary? Arnold spent his whole life in trying to persuade himself and others that neither alternative was necessary or right; but the sadness remained, and a half-despairing resignation is the dominant note of his most characteristic poetry. Already in 1848 life seemed to him a "long heart-wasting show;" and though his later view was more cheerful, it was never joyful. Man's life is

. . . the hot race  
 Wherein he doth forever chase  
 That flying and elusive shadow, *rest*.<sup>1</sup>

In the "Scholar-Gipsy" he complains of

This strange disease of modern life,  
 With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
 Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts.

Happy, in comparison, is the "Scholar-Gipsy:"

Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,  
 Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.

"Men have such need of joy," he said, that "joy in widest commonalty spread," which Wordsworth found. But already in "Empedocles" he confessed,

The world hath failed to impart  
 The joy our youth forebodes;

and long afterwards, in "Dover Beach," the note is the same, "the eternal note of sadness:"

. . . The world which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Buried Life."

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

From his "Poems" and his "Letters" alike we learn how intimate and wholesome, how almost Wordsworthian, was Arnold's communion with nature; and yet even

. . . through the hum of torrent lone  
 And brooding mountain bee  
 There sobs I know not what ground-tone  
 Of human agony.<sup>1</sup>

Even of "that general life which does not cease," the secret is "not joy, but peace:"

. . . The mute turf we tread  
 The solemn hills around us spread,  
 This stream which falls incessantly,  
 The strange scrawled rocks, the lonely sky,  
 If I might lend their life a voice,  
 Seem to bear rather than rejoice.<sup>2</sup>

Not joy, then, but self-renunciation, he found to be the higher rule, as George Eliot did, as Goethe did:

He only lives with the world's life  
 Who hath renounced his own.<sup>1</sup>

"Sick for calm," like Balder, he prayed:

Calm soul of all things! make it mine  
 To feel, amid the city's jar,  
 That there abides a peace of thine,  
 Man did not make and cannot mar."<sup>3</sup>

This calm, or peace, Arnold, like his favorite Hebrew prophet, is fond of figuring as a river. "Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." (Isa. xlviii. 18.) "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream." (Isa. lxvi. 12.) Compare the concluding lines of "The Future:"

But what was before us we know not,  
 And we know not what shall succeed.  
 Haply the river of Time—  
 As it grows, as the towns on its marge  
 Fling their wavering lights

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<sup>1</sup>"Obermann." <sup>2</sup>"Resignation." <sup>3</sup>"In Kensington Gardens."

On a wider, statelier stream—  
 May acquire, if not the calm  
 Of its early mountainous shore,  
 Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush  
 Of the gray expanse where he floats,  
 Freshening its current and spotted with foam  
 As it draws to the ocean, may strike  
 Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—  
 As the pale waste widens around him,  
 As the banks fade dimmer away,  
 As the stars come out, and the night wind  
 Brings up the stream  
 Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.

So, too, I am sure, at the close of “Sohrab and Rustum,”  
 where the old warrior has unwittingly slain his own son,  
 the same beautiful figure typifies the rest that is now So-  
 rab's, and promises peace to Rustum's remorse.

. . . and from his limbs  
 Unwillingly the spirit fled away,  
 Regretting the warm mansion which it left,  
 And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.  
 So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead,  
 And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak  
 Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.  
 As those black granite pillars, once high reared  
 By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear  
 His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps  
 Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—  
 So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.  
 And night came down over the solemn waste,  
 And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,  
 And darkened all; and a cold fog, with night,  
 Crept from the Oxus; . . .  
 But the majestic river floated on,  
 Out of the mist and hum of that low land,  
 Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,  
 Rejoicing, through the hushed Chorasmian waste,  
 Under the solitary moon; he flowed  
 Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè  
 Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin  
 To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,  
 And split his currents; that for many a league  
 The shorn and parceled Oxus strains along  
 Through beds of sand and matted, rushy isles—  
 Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had

In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,  
 A foiled, circuitous wanderer—till at last  
 The longed-for dash of waves is heard, and wide  
 His luminous home of waters opens, bright  
 And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars  
 Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

But if Arnold does not bring a message of hope as Tennyson did, of joy as Browning did; if to him the hereafter is simply

The future and its viewless things,  
 That undiscovered mystery;<sup>1</sup>

if of his lost friend, Arthur Clough, he could say only,

For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep  
 The morningless and unawakening sleep  
 Under the flowery oleanders pale;<sup>2</sup>

if he does conclude

Unduped of fancy, henceforth man  
 Must labor! must resign  
 His all too human creeds, and scan  
 Simply the way divine;<sup>3</sup>

he does not, for all that, say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Arnold's essential doctrine, preached at length in several prose volumes, is contained in a single line of the poem, "Wordly Place:"

The aids to noble life are all within.

And in the "Better Part" he says:

Hast thou no second life? Pitch this one high!  
 Sits there no judge in Heaven our sin to see?  
 More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!  
 Was Christ a man like us? Ah, let us try  
 If we then, too, can be such men as he.

Amid all doubts and uncertainties, one must still pursue "whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report;" must strive to be one of

. . . that small transfigured band,  
 Whom many a different way  
 Conducted to their common land—  
 . . . . .  
 Whose one bond is that all have been  
 Unspotted by the world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"A Wish." <sup>2</sup>"Thyrsis." <sup>3</sup>"Obermann Once More." <sup>4</sup>"Obermann."



He did seem, moreover, to believe, at least at times, in some sort of eternal life. Of the Brontës, who lie buried in Haworth churchyard, he says:

Unquiet souls!  
In the dark fermentation of earth  
In the never idle workshop of nature,  
In the eternal movement,  
Ye shall find yourselves again.<sup>1</sup>

And he suggests how and by whom eternal life may be attained:

The energy of life may be  
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;  
And he who flagged not in the earthly strife,  
From strength to strength advancing—only he—  
His soul well knit, and all his battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to *eternal life*.<sup>2</sup>

And so for his father his faith rings out above doubt:

Somewhere, surely, afar  
In the sounding labor house vast  
Of being, is practiced that strength,  
Zealous, beneficent, firm!  
Yes, in some far-shining sphere,  
Conscious or not of the past,  
Still thou performest the word  
Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live—  
Prompt, unwearied as here!<sup>3</sup>

Those who know how completely the "eternal note of sadness" dominates Arnold's poetry, and so must have been the real note of his inner being, are glad to know from the "Letters" how happy was his wedded life; how he loved and was loved by his children and relatives and friends; how fond he was of brooks and rivers and lakes, of the sea and of the mountains, of flowers and animals; how cheerful and brave and kindly he was to everybody; that it was the "Weltschmerz" alone that made him sad.

It has been suggested that as Arnold's characteristic note is the cry of the *mal du siècle*, if the world should ever be healed of this, and an era of faith return, then Arnold's day would be done; the age of spiritual discomfort having

<sup>1</sup> "Epilogue" (Haworth Churchyard). <sup>2</sup> "Immortality." <sup>3</sup> "Rugby Chapel."

passed, we should heed no longer the song which voiced that age. There is something in this suggestion; but I cannot admit its full force. Even in poems whose dominant note is "the eternal note of sadness," there are strains of high seriousness and austere beauty which will live on in spite of all changes of thought and feeling, no matter whether faith dies or revives. Such are "Dover Beach," "The Future," "Resignation," "The Youth of Nature," and "Obermann." But there are to be found also in Arnold passages of pure poetry which sing themselves into our souls simply by reason of their sunny atmosphere and smiling landscape, because of their classic repose or their calm pathos. Such, for instance, are "Thyrsis," stanzas 6-14 and 16-20; the "Scholar-Gipsy," 8-13 and 21-25; the Cadmus and Harmonia and the Apollo and Marsyas choruses in "Empedocles;" "The Forsaken Merman;" "The Church of Brou," III.; "Tristram and Iseult," III.; and, crowning achievement of all, the close of "Sohrab and Rustum." I will allow myself to quote, in further illustration, only two short passages from poems on which any lover of Arnold might safely rest his claim to be a true poet. The one is from "The Forsaken Merman:"

We went up the beach, by the sandy down  
Where the sea stocks bloom, to the white-walled town;  
Through the narrow paved streets, where all was still,  
To the little gray church on a windy hill.  
From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,  
But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.  
We climbed on the graves, on the stones worn with rains,  
And we gazed up the aisle through the small leaded panes.

The other passage is from the Apollo and Marsyas chorus in "Empedocles:"

Many a morning had they gone  
To the glimmering mountain lakes,  
And had torn up by the roots  
The tall crested water reeds  
With long plumes and soft brown seeds,  
And had carved them into flutes,  
Sitting on a tabled stone  
Where the shoreward ripple breaks.

Of this passage Andrew Lang says: "The landscape of these lines seems to me almost unapproached for felicity in English poetry."

A stronger claim still might be made for Arnold. Not single poems only, nor single striking passages, but single great lines prove him to be a poet. Commenting on such lines as

Where Orpheus and where Homer are,  
and

Hungry, and sharp, and barren as the sea,

Lang says: "If no more than fragments like these were left of Arnold's poems (and as evil a fate has befallen some of the Greeks), a competent critic of the far-off future would be able to say that the author of them was in the truest sense a poet." How easy it would be to multiply the number of such great lines!

Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;  
And that sweet city with her dreaming spires;  
And Egremont sleeps by the sea;  
The far-off sound of a silver bell;  
All the live murmur of a summer's day;  
Not daily labor's dull Lethean spring,  
Oblivion in lost angels can infuse  
Of the soiled glory, and the trailing wing.

Perhaps the human character which most attracted Arnold was the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. The greatest of his essays, except those introductory to the poets, was about this "imperial sage, purest of men." It was with the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius that the bereaved father, on the morning after his first great sorrow (the death of his oldest son), was trying to console himself. "Readers of the 'Essays in Criticism,'" says the editor of the "Letters," "will remember the beautiful eulogy on that great seeker after God, and will perhaps feel that in describing him the friend who speaks to us in the following pages half unconsciously described himself. 'We see him wise, just, self-governed, tender, thankful, blameless, yet, with all this, agitated, stretching out his arms for something beyond, *tendentemque manus ripæ ulterioris amore.*'"

This was indeed Arnold; and his poetry, being the truest expression of himself, was full of this Aurelian note. "His graver pieces sound," says Frederic Harrison, "like some echo of the imperial 'Meditations' cast into the form of a Sophoclean chorus." His constant "brooding over man's destiny," his "pensive philosophy of life," his gnomic vein, naturally fitted him for elegy, and it is perhaps generally agreed that here he is at his best. This was clearly Tennyson's feeling. "Tell Matt. Arnold," he said, "to write more poetry like 'Thyrsis' and the 'Scholar-Gipsy,' and let such subjects as 'Culture and Anarchy' alone."

"This undertone of thought and austerity gives," says Frederic Harrison,<sup>1</sup> "a uniform and somewhat melancholy color to every line of his verse, not despairing, not pessimist, not querulous, but with a resolute and pensive insight into the mystery of life and of things, reminding one of those lovely tombs in the Cerameicus at Athens, of Hegeso and the rest, who in immortal calm and grace stand, ever bidding to this fair earth a long and sweet farewell."

"Every one is more sensitive about his poetry than about his other writings," said Arnold in a letter; and we are curious to know what he had to say about his own poems. He mentions them in the "Letters" far less frequently than his prose articles, doubtless because, as compared with the reception of his critical work, the poems were less talked about. "I always feel," he wrote about the poem on Stanley in 1882, "that the public is not disposed to take me cordially; it receives my things as Gray says it received all his except the 'Elegy:' with more astonishment than pleasure at first, and does not quite make out what I would be at; however, that the things should wear well, and be found to give pleasure as they come to be better known, is the great matter." He intimates, in referring to commendations of Kingsley and Froude, that the leading literary men had welcomed his poems. Disraeli told him that he was "the only man whom he ever knew who had become a classic in his own lifetime;" though he referred, doubtless, to Arnold's

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<sup>1</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, March, 1896.

critical work. "No one can deny that he is a poet," said Tennyson. George Eliot said that "of all modern poetry, his was that which kept constantly growing upon her;" and the Bishop of Derry told him that his poems "were the center of his mental life, and that he had read many of them hundreds of times." But with the general public it was different. "It is curious," he wrote in 1878, "how the public is beginning to take them [his poems] to its bosom after long years of apparent neglect. The wave of thought and change has rolled on until people begin to find a significance and an attraction in what had none for them formerly. . . . The writers of poetry have been better friends to me always than the mass of readers of poetry."

Notwithstanding the infrequent reference, we can gather from the "Letters" Arnold's own estimate of the worth of his poetry, and what he thought of its future. And no truer judgment has been given on his poems than that by himself in a letter to his mother in 1869. "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it. It might be fairly urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigor and abundance than Browning; yet because I have more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn as they have had theirs."<sup>1</sup> That the fusion of poetical sentiment and intellectual vigor was his ideal in poetry he had already stated six years earlier. "I do not at present," he wrote his mother in 1863, "very much care for poetry unless it can give me true *thought* as well as true feeling. It is the alliance of these two that makes great poetry, the only poetry really worth very much." He intended, then, his poetry to be "a hidden ground of thought and austerity within," and few things would have pleased him so much could he have

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters," II., 10.

read his sometime opponent Frederic Harrison's frank recognition of his "intellectual vigor and abundance." "He has," says Harrison, "more general insight into the intellectual world of our age, and he sees into it more deeply and more surely, than any contemporary poet."<sup>1</sup> Again, "It must be conceded that Arnold in his poetry dwells in a higher philosophic ether than any contemporary poet. He has a wider learning, a cooler brain, and a more masculine logic." And we can imagine him after a while in the Elysian fields, shaking hands gratefully with the Positivist for this verdict: "But those who thirst for the pure Castalian spring, inspired by sustained and lofty thoughts, who care for that *σπουδαιότης*, that 'high seriousness' of which he spoke so much as the very essence of the best poetry—have long known that they find it in Matthew Arnold more than in any of his even greater contemporaries."

I have for some time considered Arnold our most stimulating and illuminating helper to an appreciation of the worth of the ancient classics. His most elaborate statement of his views on the classics is to be found, of course, in what he called his "doctrine of studies," the lecture on "Literature and Science." But all through his works there are remarks, comparisons, suggestions which illuminate and rejoice the spirit of the classicist. But, best of all, his best work is the true spirit of the classics. "He had been sprinkled," says Frederic Harrison, "with some of the Attic salt of Lucian; was imbued with the classical genius—and never so much as in his poems. . . . It may be said that no poet in the roll of our literature, unless it be Milton, has been so essentially saturated to the very bone with the classical genius." "Arnold is 'classical,'" Harrison adds, "in the serene self-command, the harmony of tone, the measured fitness, the sweet reasonableness of his verse." That is high praise, and richly deserved. Like Gray, he "lived with the great poets, above all with the Greeks," and he makes grateful acknowledgment of his indebtedness to his ancient masters. "I say," said he in "Preface to Poems" (1854),

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<sup>1</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, March, 1896.

“that in the sincere endeavor to learn and practice, amid the bewildering confusion of our time, what is sound and true in poetical art, I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing among the ancients.” “Let us study them,” said Arnold in concluding his “Preface;” “they can help to cure us of what is, it seems to me, the great vice of our intellect, manifesting itself in our incredible vagaries in literature, in art, in religion, in morals—namely, that it is fantastic and wants sanity.”

Of especially Greek qualities we may claim for Arnold’s poetry “severe and scrupulous self-restraint;” “clearness of arrangement, vigor of development, simplicity of style,” as well as “lucidity of thought” and “purity of method.” It is characterized, besides, not only by high seriousness and austerity, but by urbanity of form and by charm, by exquisite polish and refined modulation. When we concede, with Frederic Harrison, that it lacks passion, dramatic power, dithyrambic glow, we have admitted that Arnold does not belong to the small number of the very greatest poets; but we may claim for him, with Harriet Waters Preston, an “assured place in the innermost circle of those who surround the very greatest.”

How are we to account for Arnold’s small poetical product? Doubtless the chief reason is given in the paragraph quoted above from one of his letters, his *existence assujettie*—in other words, his school inspecting. But there is surely an additional reason. Perhaps Tennyson realized the danger to Arnold’s poetical productivity when he sent word: “Tell Matt. Arnold to write more poetry like ‘Thyrsis’ and the ‘Scholar-Gipsy, and let ‘Culture and Anarchy’ alone.” Situated as he was, he could devote only part of his energy to literature. There must be a sacrifice somewhere. One who considered him the greatest of English critics would hardly suggest that he, like Tennyson, should have given himself exclusively to poetry. His literary criticism will abide at least a permanent influence on English literature; his poetry will live. It is his social, political, and religious essays that in the very nature of the

case must be shortest lived; and if he made a mistake in his literary work, it was there. He spent in controversy energy which belonged to poetry and to literary criticism. He "gave to sermons what was meant for song." But, being his father's son, and feeling religious and political questions so strongly, this was probably inevitable. His father used to say, "I must write a pamphlet or burst;" and Matthew Arnold was too much his father's son not to be drawn into the discussion of religious and political questions. He himself realized the danger early, for he wrote in his thirty-ninth year to his mother: "I must finish off for the present my critical writings between this and forty, and give the next ten years earnestly to poetry. It is my last chance. It is not a bad ten years of one's life for poetry if one resolutely uses it; but it is a time in which, if one does not use it, one dries up and becomes prosaic altogether."<sup>1</sup> Again, three years later, in a letter to Grant Duff, he expresses this feeling still more strongly: "One is from time to time seized and irresistibly carried along by a temptation to treat political or religious or social matters directly; but after yielding to such a temptation I always feel myself recoiling again, and disposed to touch them only so far as they can be touched through poetry."<sup>2</sup> But he kept yielding to the temptation. And how could he be expected to resist, when this sort of thing gave him great and immediate popularity? "I am struck," he writes to his mother in 1868, "to find what hold among these younger men what I write has taken. I should think I heard the word 'Philistines' used at least a hundred times during dinner, and 'Barbarians' very often."<sup>3</sup> After all, must it not be admitted that Arnold was not "driven by his demon to poetry," as Shelley and Byron were?

Arnold thought, as has been said above, that he was likely enough to have his turn, as Tennyson and Browning had had theirs. And Frederic Harrison thinks that, because of its appeal to the best and most serious modern thought, his poetry "is almost certain to gain a wider audience, and to

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<sup>1</sup> "Letters," I., 165. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 267. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 457.



grow in popularity and influence.' Has Arnold's turn come? Mr. Stead has recently made an interesting experiment in England. He sent forth a selection from Arnold's poems as No. 26 of his "Penny Poets." Nearly two hundred thousand copies were sold within six months, and Mr. Stead received cordial letters from common people who had not before heard of Arnold. Pastors, too, are surprised to find workingmen full of interest in Matthew Arnold; and public libraries report a new demand for his poems. But all this proves too much. This popularity is fictitious. So, the year after Carlyle's death, seventy-two thousand copies of the six-penny edition of "Sartor Resartus" were sold in Great Britain alone. But all the same, "Sartor Resartus" can never be a popular book with the common people. Doubtless Arnold's day will come, and is already coming; but his appeal will always be to a select though steadily growing audience; it can never be to the mass of ordinary readers.

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